

Growing Pains by chloerigby

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Language: English

Characters: Billy H., OC, Steve H.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-11-06 10:16:29

Updated: 2019-11-29 10:47:55

Packaged: 2019-12-12 15:08:57

Rating: M

Chapters: 5

Words: 18,334

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Life is hard when you're about to turn 18. It's even harder when you realize you might be completely out of love with your long time boyfriend, and you can't stop thinking about the new boy in town.

1. Chapter One

A/N: Happy Stranger Things day everyone! I'm so excited for this fic! We all know I love an Arcade Dreams AU. This is gonna be taking place in the summer of 85, because we all know Billy deserves a *nice* summer instead of the one he got. I'm also gonna be giving a name to Steve's mom because she's gonna appear quite a bit and honestly the duffer brothers give us more content with Steve's parents. It's also the first appearance of Hopper! Teddi! I hope you all enjoy it!

xxx

It was Sunday morning. Well, technically afternoon. If Teddi cracked one of her eyes open she could see the sun trying to shine through the ugly, off white, checkered curtains that perfectly matched the ugly, off white, checkered wallpaper that she hated. Teddi squoze her eyes shut and willed herself to go back to sleep. She didn't want to look at the little digital clock on the nightstand beside her.

As Teddi snuggled further under the plushy, dark blue comforter an arm snaked around her middle. She smiled as her back met a warm chest she hadn't realized her body had been missing so much. "Rise and Shine, Teddi Girl." her boyfriend, Steve Harrington mumbled into her hair. He combed his fingers through it gently in an attempt to wake her up. Heather Holloway had just helped her dyed it. They had bleached Teddi's sandy blonde hair into an almost platinum white color. Steve called her Casper when he first saw it.

Teddi groaned and buried her face into her pillow. "Five more minutes." she complained.

"It's past noon!" Steve laughed. "C'mon, Ted, this is our last summer of freedom. We should be outside doing stupid, reckless stuff." Teddi didn't want the reminder. They had graduated from high school only two weeks ago. Steve seemed to be resigned in the fact that he had absolutely no idea what he was going to do with his life now. He was content with working at Scoops Ahoy. And while Teddi loved her jobs at the arcade, video store and public pool, she couldn't help but feel scared. She had *no* idea what she wanted to do with her life.

Teddi rolled over, her nose almost touching Steve's. "If you let me sleep a little longer we can always do something stupid and reckless in here." she let out a giggle as Steve's cheeks grew a bit pink.

"When you put it that way..." he said with a teasing grin. Steve leaned in to kiss Teddi, but she jerked away when there was a knock at his door.

"Steve, hun? You awake?" it was his mom. Teddi tried to get out of bed as quickly as she could, tripping up on the comforter and falling to the floor before she started to get dressed. "I can make you breakfast before you head off to work. Is Teddi staying?"

Teddi's eyes widened as she stopped in her tracks. "Um...sorry, Mrs. Harrington! I gotta get home before my dad gets worried!" she called, jerking her cut off shorts on. It wasn't that Teddi didn't like Steve's mom. Kitty Harrington was one of the coolest adults she knew. She was super trendy and threw some great parties. It was an added bonus that she usually let Teddi and Steve drink at those parties. Plus Kitty adored Teddi. Steve told her she said that Teddi had spunk.

Steve ran a tired hand over his face. "It' fine, ma! I'll grab something on the way to work. I gotta pick robin up anyways." he rolled his eyes dramatically and smiled over at Teddi.

She pulled on her top, a lime green t-shirt that she had cropped herself and gave Steve a look like he'd grown a second head. How could he be so calm? "She knows that I sleep over?" she asked.

"Oh, yeah. She was cleaning my room and you kinda left one of your bras..." Teddi groaned. "I can get it for you if you want. It's down in the laundry room. She uses that Snuggle brand detergent, you know with the little bear-"

"Steve."

"...Sorry. Are you okay?" he asked, walking over to her. His hands rested at her elbows. "Ted, she's not mad or anything. I mean, technically speaking we're adults," he reminded her. "I mean what's she gonna do, ground me?"

Adults, Teddi thought sadly. She didn't want to be an adult. Teddi shook her head. "I'm fine, sorry. It's just...weird. Can you give me a ride home?" her van was back home. After she'd gotten home from work Steve had surprised her, knocking on her window and convincing her to sneak out for the night. Only now it wasn't really sneaking out, she supposed. How *boring*.

"Well, wait. You wanna go get lunch or something? Catch a movie?" Steve asked as he got dressed.

"I thought you had work?"

"I don't *really*. Do you wanna go downstairs and have brunch with my mom?" he shot a teasing grin her way. Steve had a point there. As much as Teddi liked Kitty, she definitely didn't want to sit there awkwardly with the two of them while they all three pretended everything was completely normal.

Teddi smiled thinly. "Right. As much as I'd love to I have to get to the arcade soon. And I have to make sure my dad doesn't like...flip his lid when he finds out I was gone all night." it was sort of a lie. Teddi had work that day, but it wasn't until later that night. She felt a little guilty blowing Steve off. Like somehow she was doing something she wasn't supposed to be doing. But just because they were dating didn't mean they had to be around each other *all* of the time, right?

The disappointed look on Steve's face made her feel even worse. "Oh. Well, that's fine. Maybe next time." they made their way downstairs, Teddi trying to almost hide herself behind Steve as they passed by his mother in the kitchen.

"Bye you two!" she called sweetly. "Teddi, say hi to your dad for me!" Teddi winced a little, turning and smiling tightly at her.

"Will do, Mrs. Harrington."

"Honey, I've told you a million times. After how long you and my Stevie have been together," she pinched Steve's cheek affectionately. Steve blushed, brushing her hand away and muttering out a *Ma, stop*. "You can call me Kitty."

Teddi let out a nervous chuckle. "Right, sorry. Sure thing, Kitty."

"Come on, mom. We gotta go, okay? I'll be back later," Steve pressed a kiss to his mom's cheek and pulled Teddi along behind him and out to his car. "Sorry about her..." he mumbled.

"Don't be. I love your mom."

"Yeah, but sometimes I think she lays it on a little thick 'cause you're her chance at grandbabies." Teddi's head whipped in Steve's direction. He hadn't even noticed. He was turned, looking over his shoulder as he backed out of the driveway. Teddi couldn't believe how casually he had said it.

"*Grandbabies*? We're having kids now?" Teddi asked with a nervous laugh.

Steve looked over at Teddi, his mouth opening and closing while he tried to figure out what to say. "...No. No. I mean...maybe? Eventually? Jesus, Harrington, you have to learn to keep your mouth shut," he muttered to himself.

If Teddi thought really hard about it she could picture herself marrying Steve. She could picture him getting a cushy job at his dad's company and the two of them buying a house down the street from Steve's parents. If she thought even *harder* she could maybe picture a kid or two with her blonde hair and Steve's big brown eyes. Now she felt nauseous. Teddi rolled down her window, pulling a cigarette out of her small, black backpack and lit it. She took a long drag, resting her head against her seat and shutting her eyes.

"You really should quit smoking." Steve said.

"*You* used to smoke, remember?"

"Yeah, until they had that assembly and brought in that black pig lung. It was totally gross," Steve flashed Teddi a lopsided grin when she let out a soft laugh. He reached over, taking her hand in his, squeezing it gently. "Listen, let's not talk about this kinda stuff anymore, huh? We've got plenty of time for all that. I still *am* a kid. I don't wanna have any any time soon."

Teddi let out a breath of relief and nodded. "Deal."

When they pulled up to the little cabin she lived in with her dad and younger sister, Steve turned to her with a smirk. "You sure you don't wanna skip out with me for the rest of the day? Last chance, Teddi Girl."

Teddi's nose scrunched up as she leaned in and kissed him. "Rain check, okay? I promise. I just don't want my dad to worry."

Steve brushed some of her hair behind her ear. "Alright, alright. I'll hold you to it." Teddi said her goodbyes, kissing Steve again and heading up to the porch. The wooden planks groaned under her boots, signaling to those inside that she was home.

Jim Hopper was lounged out in his recliner that sat in front of the TV just like he always was on his day off. El was perched beside him on the couch, the two of them snacking on chips and salsa while they watched some old Gilligan's Island reruns. When Teddi walked in they both turned to look at her. El looked at her with this secret little smile of hers. Like she had known exactly where her older sister had been all night and was enjoying the scandal of it. Hopper frowned at his daughter. He too knew where Teddi had been, and he *definitely* wasn't enjoying the scandal of it.

"Ooo, Gilligan," Teddi said, plopping down onto the couch next to her sister. "Which one is this?" she was ignoring the way that her dad was practically staring a hole in the side of her head.

"They got superpowers from vegetables." El said, shoving a chip that was nearly too big into her mouth.

"Nice. I love this one." Teddi grabbed a chip, reaching over to dip it into the salsa. Hopper grabbed the jar and held it away from her. The two finally made eye contact.

"Where ya been, Ted?" he asked, eyebrows raised. He knew. Teddi knew that he knew. No point in lying.

Teddi shifted a little in her seat. "...With Steve."

Hopper groaned. It was no secret that he hated the fact that his two

teenage daughters were dating. It didn't help matters that Mike Wheeler and Steve Harrington were two of the most *annoying* kids he'd ever met. "Do you remember when you came to live with me?" he asked. "You were ten and you said that boys were gross?"

Of course she remembered. Hopper had adopted Teddi eight years ago. Teddi saw it as an act of fate. She'd grown up with awful parents. They didn't love her or care about her. Her father had some cushy job that she had never really understood. Something about working with the mayor. Hopper had been working homicide cases in the city. When Teddi's father, Greg, had been discovered as the main culprit behind one of Hopper's cases they'd taken him into custody. Now he was in prison for a *long* time with no sign of parole. There had been an investigation into her mother, Bonnie, and when the police discovered she was definitely not capable of raising Teddi it was decided she'd be put into the foster care system.

"I think this is a sign, kid," he had said. "We're both looking for a fresh start. So what do you say?" Teddi had decided to take the leap of faith. In the short amount of time she had known Hopper he had shown her more kindness than anyone else she had known. Plus, she thought it was funny how grumpy he was.

Now, Hopper looked over at his two daughters and sighed. "El, you mind giving us a second?" El didn't need to be told twice. She knew Teddi was about to get one of his famous "Hop Talks". She hopped up from the couch, shooting Teddi a sympathetic smile before disappearing into her room. Cindy Lauper started playing on the other side of the door.

Hopper patted the arm of the couch, silently asking Teddi to scoot over. She moved closer, letting out a small sigh. "Dad..."

He held up his hand. "Look, I get it, okay? You're eighteen. You're not a little girl anymore. You don't need to ask dad for permission...as much as I absolutely *hate* it. And you and Harrington have been together long enough for me to know he's not going anywhere any time soon," he rolled his eyes. "But next time, can you give me a heads up? With as *little* amount of detail as possible. Just so I can have some peace of mind?"

"Sure, dad. I'll leave a note next time," she nodded.

"See? I can be calm," he crossed his arms firmly across his chest, grinning proudly. "No yelling. No banning Steve from the house. It's a whole new Hop."

Teddi snickered. "Yeah, Joyce sure has made a lot of progress." she teased. All in all, Hopper was pretty easy to deal with. There were times when he could be the most stubborn man on the planet. And there were times when Teddi pushed his buttons as hard as she could. But they were family, and in the end they always worked things out. Even if sometimes it meant lots of yelling and telepathic tantrums on El's end.

Teddi was silent for a moment while she thought about her conversation she'd had in the car with Steve. "...Do you think I should marry Steve?" she asked.

Hopper choked on a chip. He sat up, coughing and sputtering. His face had gone all red and he had some tortilla chip crumbs in his mustache. "Do I think you should do *what?*! Why- why would you ask me that? Has he asked you?" so much for the new Hop.

"Nooo, no. He just brought it up. I don't know...it freaked me out, I guess. And his mom says I'm her chance at grandkids-"

"That woman drives me crazy." Hopper muttered.

"She says hi, by the way."

Hopper only grunted. "You know what? New rule. You and El aren't getting married until I'm dead." he said firmly. Teddi shot him a look and he let out a loud sigh. "I can't believe I'm about to have this talk, because you're only *eighteen*...but if Steve is the person you're supposed to be with, the person you marry and settle down with, you'll know it. I know you two think you're in love now, and maybe you *are*, but marriage isn't something you just *do* because you think it's what's right. *Believe me*,"

"The person you marry should be someone that'll stick with you no matter what. No matter how bad things get. They'll see the ugliest

side of you and they wanna stick around. And they might drive you up the wall sometimes, but it's all worth it in the end. That's the kinda guy you need to marry. And if it's not Steve then you'll find him...but hopefully not 'til after I'm dead."

Teddi rolled her eyes. "*Dad*," she groaned. Suddenly she felt jealous of El. She had that sort of relationship with Mike, and they were barely fourteen years old. At one point she might have thought she had that with Steve. Now she wasn't so sure. "...Thanks. That actually really helps."

Hopper rested his hands behind his head, fighting a proud smile. "It's what I'm here for."

"So you're not mad? You don't wanna ground me or something?"

Hopper chuckled. "Ground you? Do you *want* me to ground you?"

Teddi smiled thinly. "I know, it sounds stupid when I say it out loud..."

"Nah. I get it. But you have plenty of time to be a dumb kid...although I'd appreciate it if you could leave boys out of the mix."

Teddi rolled her eyes and smiled. "Yeah, I bet. Do you mind if I take El out for a few hours before my shift?"

"As long as there's no Mike," he muttered. Teddi scoffed. "...Just make sure she's home by curfew."

Teddi gave her dad a thumbs up. "Deal. Love ya, Old Man." she grinned over at him.

Hopper grumbled, once again trying to hide a smile. "Yeah, yeah. Love you too, Kiddo."

xxx

Summer time meant the Palace Arcade would be jam packed with kids. It seemed like every game had a line of tokens left by kids holding their place to be next to play. Teddi was bouncing back and

forth between the prize counter and the floor. If she wasn't taking change for tokens or trading in tickets for prizes she was fixing broken machines, replacing empty rolls of tickets and even mopping up a chocolate milkshake that Bradley Andrews slammed down onto the carpeted floors after losing at Qbert for the fifth time that night. Teddi banned him from the arcade for a week.

Things had dulled down for a bit. A lot of the kids were starting to funnel out and to their parents who were parked outside waiting to take them home. El and her friends were still there. They were in the corner taking turns at Galaga. Teddi watched on as her little sister happily played alongside Mike.

"Can I get some tokens?" Teddi looked over at the red head who was standing on the other side of the counter, looking up at Teddi expectantly. She dropped three bucks and some quarters onto the counter top.

Teddi eyed her carefully, taking her change. "...You're new." it wasn't a question. Teddi knew every kid in Hawkins. She had never seen this girl before.

The redhead gave Teddi a look like she had started speaking in a different language. "...Yeah."

"Did you just move here or something?" Teddi asked.

The girl shifted impatiently. "We moved here Friday."

"Ooo, from where?"

"California." she huffed.

"Nice! I've always wanted to go there. How come you moved here? It sucks here."

"I know it does. And you'd have to ask my step dad. He sucks even more than Hawkins." she smiled a little when Teddi laughed.

"Well, I'm Teddi. I'm pretty much always here," she nodded over to where Eleven was. "That's my sister, El. Her and her friends are around your age, I think. They're pretty cool kids. I mean if you're

looking for people to hang around with." she offered.

"...Max. And I'm not really...I kinda prefer being on my own," she explained. "But, thanks...I guess." she took the tokens from Teddi and hurried off towards the Dig Dug machine. The bell on the door rang, and Teddi looked up to see Steve walking in. He was still in his Scoops Ahoy uniform.

Steve leaned across the counter to kiss her, Teddi's nose filling with the smell of waffle cone batter and butterscotch. She looked up at him with a happy but tired smile. "They're putting you through the ringer tonight, huh?" Steve asked with a chuckle.

Teddi groaned. "You have no idea. I don't think my night can get any worse."

"Oh yeah? Well, what if I told you I stopped by the food court after work," he held up a white paper bag. "And got you one of those giant sugar cookies you like from Mrs. Fields?" he grinned, waving the bag out in front of her.

"I'd say, Steve Harrington, you are the absolute love of my life," she sighed happily, snatching the bag from him. Teddi was sure that she had put on a good ten to fifteen pounds since the Starcourt mall had opened that summer. But it was hard to say no to a sugar cookie with sprinkles that was as big as her head.

Teddi took a bite, her eyes shutting and her head falling back as she let out a content groan. Steve laughed. "Jeez, I don't think I can even get those kinda noises out of you." He teased.

Teddi felt herself blush. She playfully pushed Steve. "Shut up. I've had a long da-" she was cut off by the sound of a horn out in the parking lot. It was loud enough that everyone inside turned to look outside, trying to figure out who the culprit was. Whoever it was, they weren't letting up any time soon. Teddi let out an annoyed groan. She stomped outside, her eyes landing on a dark blue Camaro that was parked directly in front of the door.

She didn't recognize the guy that was honking. He was her age, but he hadn't gone to Hawkins High. "Hey! Douchebag! Do you mind?

Lay off the horn!" she yelled. The boy poked his head out of his window and fixed a glare in her direction.

"Bite me, Barbie. Why don't you mind your own?" he spat. *What a dick*, Teddi thought with a scoff. He looked Teddi up and down before flashing what Teddi had to admit was a charming smile. It still didn't make her want to hit him any less. "On second thought, how 'bout you hop in and I'll do the biting?" he smirked.

"How about I shove my *foot* up your *ass* you-" Teddi lunged forward, moving towards the Camaro. Before she could step off the curb Steve caught her by the wrist.

"Eeeasy there, Teddi Girl. Just ignore him, huh? Hey! Come on, dude. Lay off the horn will ya?" Steve tried to reason.

"Aye, aye, Skipper!" he called back at Steve, saluting him mockingly.

"Billy, will you cut it out?" it was Max. She was standing next to Teddi with a skateboard in her hands. "Let's just get out of here, okay?" she walked over to the car, shooting an apologetic and bashful look back at Teddi.

"I said *nine*, Max. It's almost nine twenty. Susan's gonna throw a bitch fit at me because your ass can't be on time." Billy spat as Max climbed in beside him. He didn't look back at Teddi or Steve as he peeled out of his parking spot and sped off.

Teddi glared at the tail lights of the Camaro until they were no longer in sight. Steve let out a short laugh. "Jesus, that guy's an asshole, huh?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah. A complete asshole," she let out a loud sigh. "I gotta get inside and start closing up. Thanks for the cookie." she stood on her toes to kiss him.

"Sure, sure. Hey, how about that rain check for the movies tomorrow?"

"I'm at the pool in the morning. I'll call you after and see?"

"Deal. I'll see ya later, Ted." he leaned in to kiss her again before

heading back to his car. Teddi let out a long, tired sigh and went back inside. She was glad to be rid of the night from hell. Her body was practically begging to crawl into bed.

Joyce Byers pulled up outside, honking her horn once and waving. Teddi waved back, saying her goodbyes to Will, Lucas, Mike and Dustin as they all filed out and piled into Joyce's car for a ride home. Only El was left. "Who was that boy that was honking?" she asked, drawing imaginary designs on the glass of the prize booth.

"I think his name's Billy. There was a new girl, Max, in here earlier and I guess he's her brother. He's a total asshole." Teddi scoffed, thinking back to their interaction.

El watched her sister carefully, that secret smile appearing on her lips again. "Oh." was all she said.

Teddi turned to look at her with a suspicious expression. "Stop looking at me like that."

"Like what?"

"You know like what," Teddi reaching into her back pocket, grabbing her keys and tossing them to Eleven. "How about you go turn on the van and stop trying to read my feelings, ET." El only laughed, turning on her heels and hurrying out to the van. Teddi shook her head and let out a sigh. At least she wasn't the only one that was intrigued by the new boy in town.

2. Chapter Two

It was almost two in the afternoon. Any minute now Teddi's shift at the Hawkins' public pool would be over, and she wouldn't have to hear a second more of the Robert Palmer album one of the moms had been playing on repeat on her tiny little boombox while her kids splashed around in the shallow end of the pool. Teddi pushed her white, star shaped sunglasses further up her nose and let out a tired puff of air, sinking in the lifeguard's chair.

"Hey, Teddi!" Heather called, waving at her best friend as she made her way over. "I'm headed out, you need a ride?" she asked.

"Please," Teddi said, climbing down from her seat and sliding her red flip flops on. "I'm about *this close* from shoving Mrs. Branson into the pool." she muttered, glaring over at Mrs. Branson who was humming along to Addicted to Love and flipping through an issue of Cosmo. Teddi and Heather both broke into a fit of giggles as they hurried past her and to the locker room.

Hopper had dropped Teddi off at the pool that morning on his way to work. She thought it would just be easier hitching a ride over to Starcourt since she'd be going on a date with Steve that night. "So, what are you gonna see with Steve?" Heather asked, plopping down on a bench near the lockers as Teddi pulled the curtain to one of the showers shut.

"I think Day of the Dead? I'm not sure. He's been trying to get me to go with him all week but I've been busy." of course Heather saw right through that.

Heather smiled, raising her eyebrows. "Busy or avoiding?" Teddi was silent. "Trouble in paradise? You and Steve have never had any issues."

Teddi chewed on her bottom lip as she shut the shower off, reaching her hand out. Heather handed her her change of clothes. "I think...I sorta think that that's what the problem is," she said finally. "I mean, I probably sound totally insane, but things have always been so...pleasant." and they had. Steve and Teddi had never really fought.

And Teddi knew that was a silly reason to be questioning her relationship, but she couldn't really help it.

"So you're bored." Heather said matter of factly.

"I'm bored," Teddi repeated with a sigh. She stepped out of the shower, now dressed in a red, ribbed tank top and jeans. She sat next to Heather, rolling the cuffs of her jeans twice before slipping on her boots. "He brought up marriage yesterday morning," she said with a groan.

Heather's eyes widened. "Oh god...oh *god*," she groaned. "That's insane, Teddi. We have like...our *entire lives* ahead of us. It's not like our parents, you know? We totally don't have to settle down when we're like nineteen anymore. Plus you shouldn't marry someone that bores you. Then you'll end up like my parents." she grumbled, rolling her eyes.

It was a relief to hear. Teddi was worried that maybe she was overreacting. The pair made their way out of the locker room, waving to Freddy as they headed out to Heather's car. "That's what I thought too! But then he said his mom's expecting grandkids. *Grandkids*, Heather. Can you imagine me as a mom?" she asked, sliding into the passenger's seat.

Heather laughed. "I don't know...I can sorta see it. Cute little blonde kid sitting in a car seat in the van. Probably wearing a band tee," she teased. Teddi rolled her eyes but smiled. "I don't know, Teddi...maybe you and Steve should take a break or something. If you take some time apart maybe you'll realize that you miss him. Or maybe you'll meet someone else."

"Oh, please. Who else am I gonna meet in this town? Everyone in Hawkins knows each other." Teddi crossed her arms and sank down in her seat.

Heather pursed her lips. "I don't know...maybe there'll be somewhere you can be in a big room with lots of people...mingling...drinking..."

"Are you talking about my surprise party that you're totally not planning?" Tedd asked with a smile.

Heather scoffed. "I don't know what you're talking about," it happened every single year since they had been in the sixth grade. Heather would suggest some low key hang out for the two of them on Teddi's birthday, and every time Heather would surprise her with a big party. This year would be an especially momentous occasion since Teddi would officially be eighteen. "Anyways, I think you should go on this date with Steve tonight, try and have as much fun as possible and then put some thought into what you wanna do. I mean, it could just be a slump, you know? That kinda thing happens like...all the time. Maybe you two need to try something kinky." she said, wriggling her eyebrows.

The two girls erupted into laughter. "Yeah, *sure*. Let me just go pick something up in Lovelace Lingerie for a night of some light BDSM." Teddi laughed. Heather laughed so loudly she let out a snort, slapping a hand over her face.

"God," Heather giggled. "Okay, bad joke. But seriously, Ted. Just go to the movies and take it from there. It's not the end of the world if you don't live happily ever with Steve." Teddi knew she was right. But Teddi didn't want to hurt Steve. She also didn't want him out of her life completely. He'd been one of her best friends for nearly half of her life.

"Okay, okay. I'll go to the movies. I'll call you when I get home, okay? Thanks for the ride." the two girls reached out and met hands in the secret handshake they had made up in the sixth grade before Teddi hopped out of the car.

"I want all the kinky details!" Heather called after Teddi, grinning widely. Teddi stuck her tongue out at her best friend, hurrying towards the doors of the Starcourt Mall. Ever since it had opened at the beginning of the summer, the mall had been absolutely packed with kids and teens alike. Teddi *loved* the mall. It was like a tiny little piece of New York right there in Hawkins. All of the trendy stores that she had missed, the bright neon lights and colorful paint jobs everywhere she looked. There was even an aerobics studio. The Starcourt mall was something that Hawkins had *desperately* needed.

Teddi weaved her way through the crowds of people, headed for Scoops Ahoy, which sat directly across from the food court

(admittedly probably her favorite part of Starcourt). Robin Buckley was at the register, flicking sprinkles off of the counter and looking like she'd rather die than be there one minute longer. Teddi and Robin had grown pretty friendly since Steve had gotten his job at Scoops Ahoy about a month before. They both liked teasing Steve endlessly, and Robin was one of the few people in Hawkins that was into the same stuff as her. El and her friends were great, but sometimes Teddi wanted to hang around people her own age.

"Ahoy!" Teddi greeted her cheerfully, jumping out in front of Robin. Robin jumped, smiling when she realized it was Teddi. "I'm here to see about setting sail on an ocean of flavor. Seen my captain anywhere?"

Robin let out a snort. "He should be coming back from his break any minute now. You know, sometimes I can't believe that you still go out with him after hearing him say shit like that." she joked.

"Ditto." Teddi laughed.

Steve came wandering in a few moments later, a Burger King bag clutched in his hand. He flashed a lopsided grin at Teddi when he saw her. "Hey! What're you doing here?" he asked, pressing a kiss to the top of Teddi's head and heading behind the counter.

"I'm here for the movie rain check, remember?" Robin groaned softly, making a face and heading to the back room. Teddi raised an eyebrow, and Steve's mouth open and shut a few times, his eyes going wide.

"Right! The movie...listen, Ted..." Teddi looked at him with narrowed eyes. "I kinda have to work a double shift tonight. It was a last minute thing. I forgot we had the movie plans tonight. I'm really sorry, I totally should've called you."

Teddi was honestly more annoyed that she didn't have a ride home now than anything. And that made her feel like an asshole. "Oh...well, that's okay. We'll just do it later," she shrugged. This definitely threw a wrench in Heather's suggestion. "Call me when you get home then and we can figure something out."

Steve was scooping up some strawberry ice cream, packing it into a cone before reaching down for another scoop. "Definitely. I'm *really* sorry, Teddi," he held out the double scoop of strawberry ice cream to her. "You forgive me, right?" he asked with a small smile.

Teddi smiled back, taking the ice cream. "It's hard to say no when you bribe me with free food," she joked. "I'll see you later okay?" she leaned across the counter, kissing him. "Tell Robin I said bye."

"Bye, Teddi!" Robin called from the back room. Steve rolled his eyes. Teddi let out a small laugh, throwing a wave over her shoulder as she walked off. If anything she could just call Hopper from one of the payphones and he'd pick her up. He'd probably be practically giddy at the chance to talk shit about Steve for cancelling on her.

Teddi headed across the courtyard of the mall, slipping into Sam Goody. She picked up a basket, eating her ice cream as she made her way down the aisles, occasionally tossing a cassette or two into her basket.

She reached forward for the new Theater of Pain album when her hand brushed against someone else's. "Oh! Sorry, I didn't-...*oh*. It's you." she rolled her eyes when she saw it was Billy that had tried to grab the same cassette.

"Nice to see you again too, Barbie." he said with a short laugh.

"That's *not* my name." Teddi huffed.

Billy snatched up the cassette. "Well how should I know? You didn't really introduce yourself when you were calling me a douchebag and threatening to shove your foot up my ass last night," he leaned against the shelves, flashing that charming smile again. "Name's *Billy*, by the way."

Teddi shifted uncomfortably, not really meeting Billy's eyes. She could feel her cheeks burn from the look he was giving her. "Teddi..." she huffed out. Teddi grabbed a Motley Crue cassette, turning on her heels and walking off. Billy followed her.

"Where's Skipper?" he asked, falling into step beside her. Teddi glared

up at him. "You know, the scrawny sailor?"

"He's not *scrawny*," she argued. "And his name is *Steve*." Billy wasn't listening anymore. It was obvious he hadn't cared in the first place. He reached forward, grabbing one of the cassettes from Teddi's basket and flipping it over in his hand.

He rolled his eyes. "Kate Bush? That shit's for chicks." he scoffed.

"You're very astute." Teddi snatched the tape back, tossing it into her basket and walking off once again. Billy chuckled behind her.

"Jesus, what's got your panties in a twist, Princess? " he asked.

Teddi made a face "*What?*" she spat, turning sharply. Her chest met Billy's harshly, almost knocking her off her feet. Billy caught her by the shoulders, holding her steady. The smell of his woody cologne and spearmint hit her like a brick. Teddi swallowed thickly, quickly taking a step back from him and fixing a glare in his direction. "...Are you always this annoying? Or am I just special?"

"What? I can't be friendly?" Billy asked, smirking down at her.

Teddi scoffed. "This is you being friendly?" she turned and took off again towards the register.

"I asked about Shawn, didn't I?"

"*Steve*."

"Whatever."

Teddi let out a loud, irritated sigh out as she placed her basket on the counter. "He's *working*. Happy now?" it had come out with a little more venom than she had intended.

Billy grinned, leaning against the counter. "Oooh, someone doesn't sound happy." he teased.

Teddi's jaw clenched tightly as she looked away from Billy, fully planning on ignoring him until he got bored and left. Something told her that that probably wasn't going to happen. "If you *must* know, we

were supposed to go to the movies. But now he's working a double shift and I'm out of a ride home."

"I can give you a ride." his tone made her cheeks grow hot again.

"That's really not necessary-"

"C'mon, Teddi. I'm trying to be friendly, remember?" his wolf like grin told her that that was the exact opposite of what he really meant. She felt a twinge of guilt at the excited little flip her stomach did at the thought. She should really just say no and call Hopper.

"...Fine," she found herself saying. After Billy paid for his new music, the two of them headed back out into the crowds filling the mall and out into the hot summer afternoon. Teddi followed him through the parking lot and to the dark blue Camaro he'd been driving the night before. "Where's Max?" she asked, sliding in next to him.

He looked almost surprised by the question. "You know Max?"

"I met her at the arcade last night. Is she your sister?"

"*Step* sister. I dropped her off at the arcade about an hour ago. That's about all there is to do in this hick ass town." he muttered. Teddi couldn't argue with him there.

"How come you moved here then? I mean, you're old enough to have stayed behind." Billy backed out of the parking spot with a jerk before speeding off. He popped the new Motley Crue cassette in the deck, his fingers immediately drumming against his steering wheel.

"Don't have enough cash. I'm gonna save up this summer and then I'm headed right back to California," Teddi was a little jealous. She sure as hell didn't have any plans like that. She barely knew what she was going to have for breakfast the next morning. "So, you and Steve going steady?" he asked, a teasing tone to the question.

Teddi had to admit, she sort of liked how brazen Billy was. He didn't shy away from much. She let out a small laugh. "Steady? Uh, yeah I guess you could say that."

"I wouldn't really picture you two together." he confessed. There was a

smug look on his face, like he was in on some secret Teddi didn't know.

She crossed her arms, turning towards him. "And why's that?"

Billy shrugged, leaning forward and pulling a pack of cigarettes and his lighter from the back pocket of his jeans. He clamped one between his lips, hesitating a little before offering one to Teddi. She hesitated herself before taking one. Billy lit his own cigarette before lighting Teddi's. "You two don't really match," he explained.

Teddi shot him an amused smile. "We don't *match*?"

"Yeah," he huffed, like he was annoyed she wasn't understanding him. "Like, my mom and my old man didn't match. She was into all that hippie shit and he's the most boring bastard on the planet," he said with a short laugh. "My step mom, Susan, she matches with him. She's even more boring than he is."

Teddi laughed. If she thought back, she supposed her parents had matched. She had just never really thought about her and Steve that way. They *were* sort of an odd pair. Teddi took a drag of her cigarette, looking over at Billy thoughtfully. "And who would you say I match with then?"

Billy smirked. "Not a guy that's dressed like a sailor."

Teddi looked away, hoping that he hadn't noticed how her cheeks were turning a deep pink *again* for what felt like the millionth time that afternoon. She decided to change the subject before she got herself into any more trouble. They spent the rest of the drive talking about music, which mostly meant Teddi would tell Billy what bands she liked and he would tell her how shitty they were. They got into a pretty heated argument about whether Van Halen was shit or not. Billy liked them. Teddi thought David Lee Roth was annoying.

When Billy pulled up to her place, Teddi was surprised at how long the car ride had felt. And not necessarily in a bad way. "So, thanks for the ride."

Billy didn't say anything. He leaned forward, reaching down in front

of her and popping the glove compartment open. She was met with the smell of spearmint and his cologne again. Teddi swallowed loudly. Billy pulled out a sharpie, taking Teddi by the wrist and scrawling what she realized was a phone number on the inside of her forearm. "Just in case Steve ditches you again."

Teddi let out a sound of disbelief. "Did you just hit on me *and* insult my boyfriend in one breath?"

Billy smirked. "Just being friendly." they sat there for a moment, neither of them saying anything. He was still smirking at her, and Teddi was trying her hardest not to smile back.

"...I'm going inside now." she announced, not moving.

"No one's stopping you."

A few more moments passed. Teddi finally smiled, letting out another short laugh and grabbing her bag. She could feel his eyes on her as she climbed out of the Camaro and walked up to her porch. She forced herself not to look back.

"Who was that?" Teddi jumped at the sound of her sister's voice. El was sitting on the couch with Mike. They were watching Ghostbusters. Teddi placed a hand on her chest, glaring down at El.

"...Billy." she said, not meeting her eyes.

Mike turned around, taking her arm and tilting his head to look at the phone number that was written there. "Is that his phone number? Aren't you like...dating Steve?" he asked with a shockingly disapproving tone.

Teddi yanked her hand away. "How about you two mind your business and I won't tell dad that you were home alone with Mike?"

Eleven and Mike looked at each other before looking back at Teddi, both of them nodding. "Deal." El said.

Teddi let out an annoyed huff, moving around the couch and heading to her room. She shut the door firmly behind her, letting out another loud huff. She looked down at Billy's phone number. Before she could

really process what she was doing, Teddi headed over to her desk, quickly jotting the number down on a notepad. She shoved the notebook in her drawer, shutting it harshly. Teddi hated how guilty she felt.

She looked down at the number again, licking the back of her thumb and wiping roughly at the ink. "Such an asshole..." she muttered. The marker wouldn't come off completely, but now it was more of a large smudge than an incriminating phone number.

Teddi fell back onto her bed with a groan. This was all so *stupid*. Maybe Heather was right. Maybe she needed to take a break from Steve. And *not* to go out with Billy. Maybe Teddi just needed to write men off for awhile. "Like that'll happen..." she muttered. She let out another groan. It felt like the ink on her arm was burning. A constant reminder of her afternoon with Billy.

If it was all so innocent then why did she feel so guilty?

3. Chapter Three

A/N: I find myself saying wow, poor Teddi and Steve while writing this, but mostly...poor Hopper. Let him rest.

xxx

The sun was barely up. Hopper was at the stove, dressed in his uniform pants and an undershirt, scrambling eggs and tossing a few slices of bacon into a pan. Teddi was in the bathroom that the three of them shared, applying sunscreen to her face and trying to stay upright. She hadn't slept very well the night before. She blamed Billy and Steve. It felt like she had been laying there in bed for hours, arguing with herself over whether breaking up with Steve was a good idea or not.

Teddi sighed, applying her lip gloss before tossing it back into her bag. She pinched her cheeks, trying to add a little color in an attempt to make herself look more lively. El was shuffling out of her room when Teddi walked out, her sister rubbing sleepily at her eyes and heading over to the fridge for some orange juice.

"Boy, you two look rough," Hopper observed, plating the scrambled eggs and bacon for the three of them. "You two stay up late watching that uh...what's it called? The one with that giant flying dog...thing?"

"Neverending Story." the girls said at the same time.

Hopper smiled, placing their breakfast at the table. "Right. Neverending Story."

"I just didn't sleep very well," Teddi said with a shrug. "El was on the phone all night." she said, looking over at her sister with a teasing smile. She had assumed she was up talking to Mike. She could hear her sister's talking animatedly and giggling all night.

El's cheeks didn't turn the deep pink color Teddi had been expecting. Eleven sat up straighter in her seat, looking more awake suddenly and looking over at her dad hopefully. "Can I sleep at Max's?" she asked. Teddi dropped her fork, sputtering loudly. Hopper looked at

the two like they'd suddenly sprouted wings.

"Max?" Hopper asked, patting Teddi's back roughly until she stopped choking. Teddi cleared her throat, throwing a thumbs up at him before taking a large drink of her orange juice. "That sounds like a boy's name. What happened to Mike?"

"Max is a girl, dad," Teddi said with an eye roll. "She's new. She comes into the arcade a lot. Since when are the two of you friends?"

"We hung out at the arcade yesterday," El said with a shrug. "Billy dropped her off." she looked at Teddi with that secret smile of hers. Teddi glared at her sister.

Hopper looked between his two daughters, frowning. "Who's Billy?"

"Max's brother." Teddi said quickly.

"...Why do I feel like there's something going on here that you two don't want me to know about?" he asked, watching the two of them over the rim of his coffee mug as he took a slow drink.

"There's not." the two girls said together.

The three of them were quiet for a moment before Hopper let out a sigh, shaking his head. "You know what? I don't wanna know. You can stay at Max's tonight. What about you, Ted? You seeing Steve tonight or do you wanna hang out with your old man?"

Teddi smiled a little and shrugged. "I honestly don't know. We've been planning to go to the movies for like a week now." she muttered.

Hopper let out a grumble, pouting a little. "...Maybe I should date too. Is Cher still with Gregg Allman?" Teddi and Eleven looked at each other before breaking out into a fit of giggles. Hopper grinned proudly like he always did whenever he got one of his girls to laugh. "What? You guys don't think I could get Cher?"

Teddi's giggles died down and she shook her head. "Of course you could, dad." she reached over, patting him on the shoulder. "I gotta get to the pool. You need a ride anywhere, Ellie Bean?" El shook her

head, and Teddi took her plate to the sink before grabbing her bag. "Later!" she called over her shoulder before heading out to her van.

She was the first one to arrive at the pool. That was usually the case in the morning. So while she waited for Freddy to show up, she pulled her copy of Dracula out of her bag. This was probably her third time reading it. Next to the Fellowship of the Ring it was one of her favorite books. She wasn't entirely sure how long she had been there reading in her car, but the sound of a familiar rumbling engine pulled her from the book.

Billy pulled up next to her van. He looked over, doing a double take when he realized Teddi was there. He cut the engine, sliding out of the Camaro and walking over to the van, leaning against the passenger's side and peering into the window. He grinned at her. "We gotta stop meeting like this."

Teddi let out a small laugh. "What are you doing here? Don't you have some other girl to annoy?"

"Nah. You're the only girl I like to annoy," his grin turned into a smirk at the way she blushed. Billy pulled out his smokes, lighting one before offering it to Teddi. She shook her head. "I got an interview today. I heard you guys have a lifeguard spot open." that made perfect sense to Teddi. Of course Billy could be a lifeguard.

"Of course you wanna work where I work. Are you sure you're not stalking me?" she teased.

"I thought you worked at the arcade?"

Teddi shook her head. "This is just on weekends. I work at the arcade and the video store during the week. I'm trying to save up."

"Oh yeah? For what?"

She didn't really know if she was honest. College? A place of her own? "...I guess I haven't really decided yet." she said with a small laugh.

Billy seemed surprisingly understanding. He blew out a cloud of smoke, nodding to the book in her hands. "Whatcha readin'?" Teddi

held the book up to show him the cover. Billy smiled, raising an eyebrow. "Vampires?"

Teddi scoffed. "It's more than just *vampires*. It's about love, and temptation, and...self identity-" the irony of how those themes mirrored her own life currently wasn't lost on her. Billy smirked at her, like he somehow knew what she was thinking.

"Oh yeah? Sounds pretty hot," Teddi rolled her eyes at him. "So you're into all this weird shit, huh? Max is too." his tone wasn't as judgemental as she had been expecting. He seemed more amused than anything.

Teddi smiled, shrugging. "It's not weird to me."

Billy watched her coolly for a moment, blowing out another cloud of smoke. "Don't you ever do anything fun?"

Teddi shot him a look. "I do plenty of fun stuff." she argued.

The smirk was back. "With Steve?" Teddi knew that Billy didn't think much of Steve. It was obvious. She could admit that it drove her crazy that Billy seemed to act like he knew everything about her in the two days that they had known each other. Or maybe it annoyed her that somehow he did seem to know her so well.

She didn't have time for the snappy comeback she had ready. A car door shut loudly next to her, and Heather came running over to Teddi's window. "Tell me all about the kinky sex!" Heather said with a wide grin, propping her arms up in the window.

Teddi looked at her best friend with wide eyes. "*Heather-*"

"What?" she looked over, her own eyes going wide when she noticed Billy. He was smiling, looking between the two girls expectantly. "*Oh...hi!*" she said with an awkward laugh. "I'm Heather...um, Teddi I'm gonna head inside. I'll see you later." she ran off without another word.

Billy smirked over at her, Teddi groaning. "Kinky sex?"

Teddi pinched the bridge of her nose. "It's a *long* story. Don't get too

excited," she nodded to a green car that was pulling into the driveway. "That's Freddy. Good luck with the interview." she said, shoving her book back into her bag.

"Don't need it," Billy winked at her. "Later, Weird Girl." he threw a wave over his shoulder, heading over towards Freddy. Teddi let out a shaky breath, sliding out of the van and heading into the girl's locker room. Heather was waiting for her there.

"Oh my *god*," Heather gasped, letting out a laugh. "I totally didn't see him there. Who is he?"

"His name's Billy. He just moved here last week," Teddi peeled off her shorts and tank top that she'd thrown on over her swimsuit, tossing them into her locker along with her bag. "He's kind of a pain in the ass."

Heather scoffed, tossing her hair over her shoulder. "*Who cares? That's* the kinda guy you get into some light BDSM with."

Teddi gaped at her, laughing. "*Heather.*" Heather only shrugged. Teddi shook her head. "Cool your jets, huh? I'm not having sex with *anyone.*"

"Wait, what? What about the movie date with Steve?" the two girls headed out of the locker room and out to the pool, the pair linking arms. Teddi sighed heavily.

"He *cancelled* on me. He took a double shift at work."

Heather scrunched up her nose and groaned softly. "That definitely doesn't help his case...what about Billy?" she asked, wriggling her eyebrows.

Teddi shot her a tired look. "What about him?"

"Well...you were just saying how you weren't gonna be able to meet anyone new if you and Steve took a break. He's new." of course Teddi had considered this already. But she had told herself over and over how completely and utterly shitty it would be for her to do.

Teddi smiled over at Heather. "Aren't you supposed to be convincing

me to work things out with Steve?"

"Not if you're miserable. We're best friends. We're supposed to want what's best for each other." she reminded her. But was Billy really what was best for her? She barely knew him.

Teddi's head fell back as she let out a groan. "Do you wanna trade lives me and deal with my problems?"

Heather let out a snort. "With Steve? No thanks. But I'd be willing to suffer through for Billy."

The two girls broke out into quiet laughter, the both of them looking over their shoulders to make sure Freddy and Billy weren't around to hear them. "Okay, okay. I gotta go set up for my class. Later, Holloway."

"Later, Larsson." Heather said, bumping her hip against Teddi's before heading off to the Lifeguard's chair.

Teddi's class went off without a hitch just like it always did. About half of her class had been picked up by their parents, the rest of them splashing around in the shallow end of the pool. Teddi was over by the locker rooms, towelling her hair off. She was a little surprised to see Billy make his way around the corner.

He stopped when he saw her, the two made eye contact as Teddi dried the water from her neck, chest and arms. Billy didn't bother trying to hide the way he looked her up and down slowly or the way he ran his tongue across his bottom lip. Teddi tilted her head as he walked over to her, smiling wryly at him. "Don't you have any shame?" she asked.

"Nope." he grinned, leaning against the wall. He was close enough that Teddi was overcome with his woody, spearmint smell.

"How'd the interview go?" she asked, wrapping the towel around her.

"I start Monday," Teddi's stomach did a flip. The two watched each other for a few moments. "So, listen. I wanted to ask-"

"Teddi!" Billy and Teddi both looked to see Steve headed in their

direction, waving at his girlfriend with a wide smile. Billy let out an annoyed sound, taking a step back from the blonde.

Teddi waved at Steve, turning back to Billy with an expectant look. "What were you gonna ask?"

"Forget it," he muttered as Steve walked up to them. "I'll see you around, Teddi. Later, Shawn." he didn't wait for an answer. Billy turned and stalked off, Teddi frowning after him.

Steve blinked a few times. "It's *Steve*..." he corrected, shaking his head and turning back to Teddi. "Hey, isn't that that jerk from the arcade the other night?" he asked, jabbing his thumb in Billy's direction.

"Yeah, he had an interview with Freddy."

Steve flashed a lopsided grin. "Of all the places he could work, huh?" he joked, leaning in to kiss Teddi. "Hi." he smiled down at her.

Teddi let out an awkward laugh. "Yeah...hi. What're you doing here?"

"I'm here for the movie rain check. I felt like total shit about last night. So I'm all yours for the rest of the night." he ran his hand up and down her arms.

Teddi smiled up at him, bouncing gently on the balls of her feet. "Yeah? Okay. Just let me go shower off. I'll be right back." she reached up to kiss him before hurrying inside of the girl's locker room. This had to mean something, right? She was excited about a date with Steve. He was making up for cancelling on her. Maybe things weren't as bleak as thought.

xxx

Teddi had of course loved the movie. She was a sucker for anything with zombies. Afterwards she and Steve had walked over to Scoops Ahoy and split a sundae before heading back to Steve's. His parents weren't home. Apparently they were off at some big dinner with an important business partner of his dad's.

"Oh, look at that...an empty house..." Steve said as they walked in. Teddi squealed as Steve scooped her up in his arms. "What do you

say, wanna head upstairs?" he asked, wriggling his eyebrows at her.

Teddi let out a giggle, wrapping her arms around his neck. "...If I *have* to." she teased. Steve scoffed, heading up the stairs and to his bedroom. He set Teddi down at the foot of his bed, his hands on her waist as he kissed her. Teddi's hands travelled down Steve's chest, grabbing fists full of the end of his shirt before she tried to pull it off.

Steve laughed, pulling away from her and helped her get his shirt off. He cupped her face, his thumb stroking her cheek softly. "What's the rush, Ted?"

She didn't really have an answer for that. Maybe she was trying to make up for the guilty feelings she had. Maybe she was hoping that if she was with Steve intimately all of her feelings she'd had in the beginning would come rushing back. "...Does it mattter?"

Steve was silent for a moment before he nodded. "Good point." he picked Teddi up, her legs locking around his waist as their lips met roughly. They fell back onto Steve's bed. He pulled away from her, peeling her shirt off much more slowly than she had yanked his off. Teddi's hands tangled into his hair as Steve's lips found a home just above her collar bone.

Teddi found herself staring at the framed picture of a red sports car that hung above Steve's desk, waiting for Steve to move on. Her stomach dropped. Was this it? Was she just not simply attracted to Steve anymore? She sighed.

Steve pulled away from Teddi, looking down at her with a concerned expression. Teddi pressed her swollen lips together, her eyebrows raised as she ran her hands up Steve's bare chest. His lips were slick from her lip gloss. "Is everything okay?" she asked.

Steve smiled, letting out an awkward laugh as he hovered over her. "...I was gonna ask you the same thing. You seem...off," he tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. "Where're you at, Teddi Girl?" he asked softly.

"I'm fine," she lied. "I'm just a little tired, I guess..."

It was obvious that Steve hadn't bought then lie. His smile faded, and he pulled even further away from her. "...Maybe we should pump the breaks on this," Steve rolled over onto his side, laying down next to Teddi. She didn't argue with him. Her arms crossed over her chest in an attempt to cover herself a bit more as the two laid there silently.

"Okay..." Steve finally said with a sigh. "You've been acting weird ever since I brought that whole marriage thing up. I told you that wasn't something we had to worry about any time soon."

Teddi sighed, covering her face with her hands. "It's not that...I mean it is, but..." how could she possibly explain it? How could she tell him how she was feeling without absolutely shattering their relationship?

Steve was quiet for a moment. "...Do you not want this anymore?"

Teddi sat up, shaking her head wildly. "No, *no*. That's not what I'm saying, Steve. I just...I don't *know* what I want," she huffed out. "I promise it's not you-"

Steve let out a dry laugh. "That's not anything I haven't heard before..."

Teddi turned to him, taking Steve's hand in hers. "*I mean it*. It's me," her eyes were beginning to pool with tears. She was a horrible person. Steve was trying so hard to make her happy and he had no idea that she was considering ending their relationship, much less that she couldn't get herself to stop thinking about Billy. "I feel like I don't know who I am anymore." she sniffed, tears running freely down her cheeks.

Steve watched her with wide eyes, almost like he didn't know what to do. He took Teddi into his arms. "Hey, hey, hey. What are you talking about?" he asked softly. "You're *Teddi*. You're beautiful, and amazing, and...I don't think there could ever be anything wrong with you." he said with a soft laugh. Steve pulled away from her, taking Teddi's face in his hands.

She wished she could make herself love Steve the way that she had in the beginning. She wished she could turn the clocks back just a year earlier when she had been nothing but a stupid kid who hadn't

realized she was so unhappy. She wished she could be the girl that Steve deserved. "...I think I wanna go home." she said quietly.

Of course Steve didn't argue. They got dressed, and they made the painfully long and painfully silent drive back to her house. "Call me later okay? Please?" Steve asked as they sat outside of the cabin. Teddi only nodded. She didn't move when he leaned into kiss her. She muttered a quiet goodbye, hurrying from the car and up the porch steps. Tears were running down her cheeks again.

Hopper was in his recliner watching Magnum PI. When Teddi walked in he did a double take, sitting up when he saw his daughter crying. "...You okay, Kiddo?" he asked, getting up from his seat and heading over to Teddi.

Teddi wiped her eyes roughly with the heels of her palms, her breath coming out a little shaky. "I- I need to talk to you."

Her dad nodded, placing a comforting hand on her back. Hopper hadn't seen Teddi this upset since New York. "Yeah, yeah. We can talk. Come on." he said quietly, leading her over to the couch.

4. Chapter Four

A/N: When I say that Teddi is gonna be risking it all this fic I mean it. Our girl is about to get us all real stressed out from her on out.

xxx

Hopper had let Teddi drink on a few occasions. It was only ever beer. On her sixteenth birthday he had taught her how to shotgun a can and told her that if anyone ever asked where she'd learned it it hadn't been from him. Tonight though, the two of them sitting on the couch, Hopper grabbed two tiny glasses and filled each of them half way full with some whiskey. Teddi was clutching onto her glass, unable to make herself stop crying completely. Hopper was patient while he waited for her to speak. He just sat there beside her, waiting until she was ready.

"...I don't think I want to be with Steve anymore." she finally said.

Hopper tensed a little. "Did he-"

Teddi shook her head, sniffing loudly. "He didn't do anything. That's part of the problem. He's like...*totally* amazing. Like, he brought up all of the marriage and kid stuff and I don't want that with him. I mean, I might not want it with *anyone*. But I don't want it with him," she took a drink, the alcohol helping her get her true feelings out. "When I kiss him it's like...ugh, I don't know. Like kissing my brother or something. I'd rather kiss Heather, and I don't even know if I like girls."

Hopper sat there on the couch, his mouth slightly open, blinking wildly. He drank the rest of his whiskey, pouring more into his glass. "Okay...there's a lot for me to unpack there," he said with a heavy sigh. "The *simplest* answer I can give you...break up with the guy."

Of course Teddi knew that. Heather had already told her that. She had told herself the same thing even. But it wasn't that simple. "I can't do that. I don't wanna hurt him." Teddi groaned, sinking in her seat.

"And you think pretending to like him is gonna spare his feelings?" of

course it wouldn't. Teddi would just be stuck in a miserable position until she snapped and she hurt Steve even more than she would now.

Teddi sighed, taking another drink. "Can't you just like...*make* yourself love someone again?"

Hopper chuckled. "Trust me, kid, it's not possible. Things would be a hell of a lot easier if you could," he grumbled. "Alright, I'm gonna tell you something that might sound a little...*conflicting* here, but you need to start being a little more selfish," Teddi raised an eyebrow. "You've always put everyone else before yourself, Teddi. Don't get me wrong, I love it about you. You know how proud I am of you and El and how selfless you two are. But look at you. You're making yourself miserable to spare someone's feelings. Steve'll be fine. You're still kids. He's got plenty of time to find someone else. You both do."

Teddi chewed on her bottom lip. She was gonna have to bite the bullet and end things with Steve. It was what was best for the best of them. She decided against bringing Billy up with Hopper. That was a completely different issue that she would have to deal with on her own. Not to mention it might actually cause Hopper to have a stroke. "...Thanks, dad. You're right. I should just break up with him." she said with a heavy sigh.

Hopper smiled over at her, wrapping his arm around his shoulder. "It's no problem, kiddo. I'm sorry I'm not better at all this...boy talk." he said with a chuckle.

Teddi smiled, resting her head on his shoulder. "You're better at it than you think."

Hopper's proud grin was back. "Yeah? Huh...well, what do you say I find us some I Dream of Jeannie reruns? You loved watching her when you were a kid." He picked up the remote, flipping through the channels.

"Sounds perfect."

—

The next morning Teddi wouldn't get out of bed. She wouldn't get out

of bed when Hopper made her her breakfast of champions, a stack of eggos with strawberry jam and a Coke, or when he sent El in to ask if she was sick. He wondered if maybe she had called Steve after he'd gone to bed and ended things. He knew teenage girls tended to mope around after a breakup. Eventually Hop couldn't stand it anymore. It was almost noon and Teddi hadn't moved from her bed. So he called in the big guns.

"Teddi?" Hopper called softly, knocking on her door. "There's someone here to see you." Teddi didn't answer.

"Don't worry about it, chief. I got this," Heather said, holding up her hand and shooing him away from the door. Hopper shot her an unsure look before letting out a grumble and heading for the couch. Heather slipped into Teddi's room, shutting the door behind her. "God, Teddi, what happened?"

Teddi slowly sat up in her bed, making room for Heather. Heather wouldn't tell her so, but Teddi looked truly pathetic. "I have to break up with Steve." was all she said, looking at Heather with wide, sad eyes.

Heather rolled her eyes, scoffing loudly. "You mean you haven't even done it yet? Have I ever told you how *dramatic* you are?"

"I can't make myself yet!" Teddi groaned. "I feel like the worst person ever. He took me to the movies last night and everything was *fine*. Then we went back to his place...I couldn't even make myself have sex with him. I ended up *crying*. God, Heather, I'm such an *asshole*." she hid her face in her hands.

"You are not," Heather huffed, pulling Teddi's hands away from her face. "...Can I be honest? I've sort of been waiting for this to happen for a while," Heather confessed. Teddi looked at her best friend with a confused frown. "I mean, it was fine in the beginning and everything. But you two have sorta grown into two completely different people now. And you just don't like..." Heather stopped to think of the right way to word it.

"We don't match?" Teddi asked with a sigh, repeating Billy's words.

"Exactly! You don't match. Steve's a nice guy, don't get me wrong, but he's...I mean, he's *nice*." she cringed a little as she said it. "He's a sort of too much of a pushover for someone like you." she explained.

Teddi let out a small laugh, pulling her knees to her chest and resting her chin on her knee. "So you're saying I should date Tommy H?" she joked.

Heather made a face. "*Gross*. No. Even if you and Tommy were the last two people on Earth. Demand a recount," they both laughed. Heather tugged on Teddi's arm lightly. "I think we should go out. Do something fun." Heather suggested.

"I have to go to work-"

"I already called Freddy and told him you weren't coming in. You'd just bum out the kids. And Steve isn't supposed to be working today so *that* means we can go to the mall and put a nice dent in that nest egg of yours."

Teddi laughed a little. She supposed it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world. It had been awhile since she'd gone out for some retail therapy. Plus, it would probably be better than having Hopper hover outside of her room all day and she *did* need new clothes. "Fiiiine. Just let me get dressed." Teddi changed from her pajamas to a pair of black bike shorts and an old, dark red, plaid shirt she'd jacked from Hopper. She left it unbuttoned, tying the front of it in a knot and slipped on her boots.

Hopper pretended to be nonchalant as Teddi and Heather made their way through the living room and announced that they were going to the mall, but Teddi knew he was relieved to see her out of bed. Heather offered to drive. When she started the car, the radio came to life, playing I Feel Love by Donna Summer loudly. Teddi shut it off with an angry jab of her finger.

Heather smiled sheepishly. "...Sorry,"

The mall was packed like it always was on weekends. Heather took Teddi's hand, pulling her through the crowds of people and towards the Gap. "Teddi, you have to try that on. It's so you," Heather came to

an abrupt stop in front of one of the mannequins. It was a leopard print sundress that was the same jade green as Teddi's eyes. Heather grabbed one of the dresses up to the rack, holding it up to Teddi. "You'd look so hot in it!" she assured her.

"...Alright fine," Teddi said with a short laugh. "I'll try it on," she grabbed a few other things that had caught her eye before disappearing into one of the dressing rooms. She'd been slightly dreading this part of shopping. Her body was different now. Her clothes hadn't been fitting as well as they once had. She felt almost embarrassed to look at herself once she had stripped down to her underwear. Everything had changed. Her hips were wider. Her butt and thighs. Her stomach no longer had that toned look that she'd gotten from working at the pool. Even her face seemed fuller. More round.

Teddi let out a loud sigh, trying on the sundress first. She took in her reflection for a moment before her shoulders slumped forward. "God, Heather. I look like friggin' Shannon Tweed." Teddi groaned, turning in a circle in front of the mirror. She wasn't entirely sure if that was a bad thing or not.

"Let me see!" Heather said, pushing the curtain aside. "Whoa *baby*. Those puppies came from all that free ice cream Steve's been giving you?"

Teddi blushed, crossing her arms over her chest. "Don't forget all the stress eating," she mumbled.

Heather rolled her eyes, turning Teddi back to face the mirror. "Teddi, you look *totally* hot in this. You *have* to get it...maybe just throw a sweater over it or something before you leave the house though so your dad doesn't like totally *freak*,"

Teddi laughed. She looked at her reflection, tilting her head slightly. Heather was right. She didn't look *bad*. Just different. A good different. "I guess it doesn't totally suck." she finally agreed.

"Definitely doesn't suck. God, what's Harrington's damage?" Heather asked. Teddi thought back to the night before and how she had covered herself up in front of Steve like she had been embarrassed of

her new figure. Steve hadn't said anything about how she looked now. Like he hadn't noticed at all.

Teddi remembered the way that Billy had looked at her at the pool. Her cheeks burned just thinking about it.

"...I'm totally getting ice cream before we leave." Heather muttered.

Between the two of them, Teddi was sure they had tried on everything in the Gap. The two girls ran from store to store, trying on new clothes and shoes, each time coming out with more bags than they had coming in with. Heather even bit her tongue long enough for Teddi to stop by the comic book shop.

The day out had definitely helped lift Teddi's mood. She hadn't thought about Steve at all for the last few hours. Even when they stopped into Scoops Ahoy so Heather could get a double scoop of USS Butterscotch. But like all good things, they must come to an end.

Teddi and Heather were walking past the bookstore when she spotted him. There was Billy; in his jeans that were like a second skin and a Def Leppard shirt. He had his arm around a girl that Teddi recognized. Her name was Mckenna. They'd had english together their senior year. She was a nice enough girl. The two of them were walking out of the movie theater, Billy seemed to be laughing at something Mckenna was saying.

"Oh no..." Heather mumbled beside her. As if he could sense Teddi watching him, Billy turned, their eyes locking. His smile faded into an almost annoyed expression as he walked by Teddi and Heather. "God, men suck." Heather muttered.

Teddi let out a soft sigh. "Yeah..." she didn't know what she had been expecting. She had a boyfriend. And Billy was an attractive guy. Of course he was gonna ask some other girl out instead of her. But that look he had given her. What the hell had that been about? The longer Teddi dwelled on it, the angrier she got.

Heather wrapped an arm around her best friend. "...You wanna go stress eat a giant cookie?" she asked carefully.

Teddi was silent for a moment before she nodded. "Yes please."

It wasn't very often that Teddi closed at the pool. Usually she preferred the morning shifts (even though she was definitely *not* a morning person). But Freddy had called and sounded a little desperate, so she figured she'd take the shift. Late shifts at the pool were pretty easy to handle. There usually weren't as many people around and all of the classes ended in the afternoon. The only downside was that she would be working with Billy. *Of course* she would be working with Billy.

When she had showed up for her shift he was perched up in the lifeguard's chair. He gave her a short wave when he saw her. She ignored him. That was her game plan for the day. Ignoring Billy. It wouldn't be too hard. She was already avoiding Steve in the hopes that *he* might break up with *her* so she wouldn't have to do it herself. El had already promised to cover for Teddi in case he called home asking for her.

But now everyone was gone. The pool had officially closed about twenty minutes ago, and Teddi was walking around picking up the things people had left behind throughout the day to add to the lost and found. Billy was skimming a few leaves that had fallen into the water. The only light was coming from the pool, casting an eerie, blue green glow on the pair. Teddi was well aware that Billy was watching her.

She walked behind him, leaning over to pick up a pair of lone goggles under one of the loungers. "What's your problem, Weird Girl?" he asked finally. Teddi jumped at the sound of his voice. She turned to him, shifting awkwardly under his gaze.

"I could ask you the same thing with the look you were giving me at the mall yesterday." she spat, crossing her arms.

Billy raised his eyebrows, letting out a laugh. "The look *I* was giving you? You looked like you wanted me dead." she supposed she couldn't really argue there. She was sure she had started scowling when she saw Mckenna with him.

"...I have a lot of shit going on. I can't be all smiles and rainbows all the time." she argued.

"With Steve?" she hated the way that Billy said Steve's name. Like it was some sort of joke she wasn't in on.

"Not everything is about Steve, you know." and while that was true, Billy had been right on the money. Teddi felt even more annoyed with him.

Billy fought a smile, leaning against the pool net in his hands. "Then how come your eyes glaze over every time I bring him up?" Teddi wanted to whack him with that pool net.

"They *don't*," she scoffed. "And what do you care anyways? Aren't you going out with Mckenna now?"

Billy smirked slowly. "Jealous, Teddi?"

"No."

"Sure seems like it." he argued.

Teddi glared up at him. "You're infuriating, you know that?"

Billy laughed, almost like he couldn't believe what Teddi had said. "Me? Sweetheart, *you're* the infuriating one. You're a tease."

Teddi gaped at him. "*Excuse* me?"

Billy let out a dry laugh, leaning in towards her. "Like you don't know? You flirt right back with me and flash that little doe eyed look at me every time you're around. You pull a guy in hook, line and sinker and then you rip it out from under him and start mentioning *Steve*. You think I'm gonna hang around waiting for you to dump his ass like some little lost puppy?"

Teddi couldn't argue with him. She *did* flirt with him. She returned the looks he gave her. And she was with Steve through all of this. Maybe it was childish of her, but Teddi hated it when people proved her wrong. She always had. Hopper had said she was a bit of a sore loser.

So she reached out, her hands pressing hard against Billy's bare chest, and shoved him into the pool. It really did make her feel a little better. Billy pushed back up to the surface, glaring up at Teddi and wiping his face. She smiled down at him, her hands on her hips.

"What are you, *five*?" he spat.

"No. But that felt *really* good," she said with a laugh. Teddi stepped forwards, reaching down for Billy's hand to help pull him out of the water. That had been a mistake. Billy grabbed her wrist roughly, easily pulling her into the water with him. She screamed before she went under. Billy was laughing when she resurfaced. Teddi glared at him, spitting out the mouth full of water at him and pushing her hair out of his face. "Asshole." she snapped.

"Giving you a taste of your own medicine, Weird Girl." he teased, swimming closer to her.

"Why do you keep calling me that?" she asked with a huff.

"Because you like weird shit, and I want to." he said evenly. Teddi rolled her eyes.

The two of them waded there in the water, neither moving to get out of the pool. Billy was closer now than he'd been before. Teddi would barely need to reach out to touch him. "...I didn't like seeing you with Mckenna." she finally confessed.

"I don't like seeing you with Steve."

Teddi let out a small laugh, shaking her head. "This is stupid. We barely know each other." she said it more to herself than to Billy.

"Does it matter?" he asked. She supposed not.

Teddi swallowed thickly. "I think- I think I'm gonna break up with him."

Billy smirked. "You think?"

"I *am*. I have to. I'm not in love with him anymore." saying it out loud to Billy, Teddi realized that it was the right decision. For her *and*

Steve. It probably helped that she could feel Billy's hands just barely ghosting her sides.

"You're giving me that look again, Teddi." he said lowly.

"What look would that be?" Teddi asked quietly. She realized she was turning the pendant that Billy wore around his neck in her fingers. They didn't look away from each other.

That wolf like grin was back. "Like you wanna kiss me but you're too chicken shit to do it." he teased.

Teddi wasn't sure who made the first move. Maybe it had been her. Proving she wasn't chicken shit. They kissed, their arms wrapped tightly around each other, with no intention of letting go any time soon.

5. Chapter 5

A/N: I'm sure after reading this chapter you guys are going to ask yourselves "Wow, Teddi, how can things get any worse?" they can and they will. So much worse.

xxx

Every inch of Teddi felt like she was on fire. Her shoulders dug harshly into the concrete edge of the pool. Billy had her anchored there, his knee pushed between her legs. Teddi ground down almost helplessly against his thigh as Billy's lips left a trail of bruising kisses from the nape of her neck and down her collarbone. He slipped the straps of her bathing suit down her arms, shoving the red suit down to her waist before his lips continued their burning, bruising journey down her chest.

Teddi's head fell back against the edge of the pool when Billy's mouth moved to one of her breasts. She didn't care that it hurt. Her hands tangled into his wet curls as she looked up at the starry sky above them, wondering how she had let herself get into this situation. Everything in her body felt like it was throbbing. Like she had been pulled too tight and she was begging to be finally released. Her stomach was turning, flipping excitedly. Her breathing was coming out in almost ragged, breathy groans. She hadn't felt like this in a *long* time.

"Bi- Billy?" he didn't answer. Billy's hand moved from her waist, playing against her ribs. His thumb rubbed lovingly at the valley between her breasts before his hand inched upwards, groping at her hungrily as his mouth continued nipping and sucking at her left breast. Teddi choked his name again, tugging at his hair.

Billy pulled away, smirking a little at her. His breathing was coming out nearly as raggedly as hers. "...Everything okay, Weird Girl?" he asked, quirked an eyebrow. Teddi's mouth opened and closed a few times, trying to focus on what she wanted to say. This was wrong. She couldn't be here in the pool with Billy. Kissing him and letting him touch her this way. Billy took her silence for an answer, peppering a few kisses across her jaw line before kissing her deeply.

Teddi's eyes fell shut, her hands bracing against Billy's chest, enjoying the feel of him. Billy knocked her legs further apart with his knee, and when his hand reached down to finally touch her where she had been *dying* for him to touch her, Teddi was snapped back to reality.

She pushed Billy away, blinking wildly as if she'd broken some sort of spell that had been over her. "*Steve.*" was all she said.

Billy looked at Teddi like she had slapped him. "...*What?*"

"I can't do this. This is so, so wrong," she wriggled out of Billy's grasp, pulling her swimsuit back on. "I'm really sorry. It's not that I don't want to. I *totally* do. It's just, I'm still technically with Steve and I'd feel like an even bigger asshole than I already do."

Billy rubbed the back of his neck. He looked more disappointed than anything. "You know, there's not really a whole lot of blood rushing to my head right now...but didn't you say you were breaking up with him?"

"*I did,*" Teddi's hands were on his chest again. Why couldn't she stop touching him? "Can we- can we just put a pin in this until *after* I break up with him?" the tips of her fingers ran up his chest lightly, playing with his necklace once again.

They were close enough that their noses were almost touching. "What are you doing to me here, Teddi?"

"I'm *sorry*. I shouldn't have even kissed you-" she was kissing him again. Teddi let out a soft huff as she pulled away from him. "You're *really* good at that," she sighed. Billy chuckled against her lips. "...I'm leaving now."

"No one's stopping you." he wrapped his arms around her waist. Teddi let that little laugh out again, the one that reminded Billy of little bells. He *liked* Teddi. He liked that she gave him shit right back and didn't shy away from him. He liked that she smelled so sweet, like peaches and the little jasmine bush his mom had planted in their backyard when he was little. He liked the way her lip gloss tasted like cotton candy, and the little freckles that lightly covered her nose and cheeks, and her big, green eyes. And he *loved* the way her body

felt in his hands and pressed up against him.

"...This is stupid," Teddi said quietly, pulling Billy back down to reality. "I barely even know you." she was saying it more to herself than to him.

"Who cares?"

Teddi didn't have an answer. "...I have to go," she wriggled out of Billy's arms, back up towards the edge of the pool once again. "Like, for real I'm leaving this time. I'll call you, okay?" her voice was coming out quickly and nervously as she pulled herself out of the water.

Billy let out a laugh. "You got my number," he called after her as she hurried off to the women's locker rooms. After she had disappeared, Billy let out a sigh, running a hand over his face. "Fuckin' Shawn..."

xxx

The next day, dressed in a pair of cut off shorts and her Palace Arcade shirt, Teddi decided to pay Steve a visit. She had about half an hour until she had to get to work. Maybe if she was on a time crunch she could just get out what she had to say to Steve and get out before things got too messy. That's what she was hoping for at least.

Teddi knocked on the door, rocking back and forth on the heels of her feet as she waited for someone to answer. Kitty opened the door, flashing a flawless smile at Teddi. "Teddi! So nice to see you!" she greeted.

Teddi smiled nervously at Steve's mom, letting out a small laugh. "Yeah, you too! Is Steve here? I kinda need to talk to him..."

Kitty stepped aside. "Sure is. He's up in his room. Steven! Teddi's here!" she called up the stairs. Teddi walked in after her, awkwardly standing in the entryway. "Charles, look who's here!" Kitty called to her husband.

Steve's father was sitting in the living room. He was wearing a polo shirt and a pair of khaki shorts, which was much different from the

usual suit and tie Teddi normally saw him in. Charles looked over at Teddi, smiling thinly at her as he turned the page of his newspaper. "Teddi." he said with a nod. He wasn't a man of many words. Even though he was sort of a dick, Teddi appreciated his short windedness.

"Hey, Mr. Harrington- uh, Kitty I'm kinda in a hurry is it okay if I just-" she pointed at the stairs.

"Oh! Of course! Go right ahead. Who knows what he's doing up there." she rolled her eyes dramatically. Teddi smiled thinly, taking the stairs two at a time and heading down the hall to Steve's room. She knocked, but didn't wait for an answer before opening the door.

Steve was lounged out in bed, headphones on and reading an issue of Just Seventeen. He looked up when Teddi walked in, smiling at her as he took his headphones off. "Hey! What are you doing here?"

Everything that Teddi wanted to say to him flew out of her mind. She had practiced it in the car on the drive over even. How to let Steve down as gently as she could. Now it was all gone. Her mouth opened and closed a few times, Steve's smile fading. He said her name. Asked if she was okay. She was still quiet.

"I want to break up." she blurted out finally.

The two of them looked at each other, neither saying anything. Teddi's heart was hammering in her chest. Steve looked like she had just slapped him. "...What?" he asked.

Teddi let out a sigh, turning and closing his door behind her. "That came out way more harsh than I meant for it to...I think we should take a break...permanently." she winced as the words came out. So much for breaking it to him gently.

Steve's eyebrows were raised and he was blinking repeatedly as he looked at Teddi. "...Can I ask why?"

Teddi hid her face in her hands, sitting down at the edge of the bed. "That's sort of a really, really long and complicated story that I don't think either of us should get into. The point is, I talked about this with Heather and my dad-"

"You talk to Hopper about our relationship?"

"Of course."

Steve shook his head. "Teddi...what is this all about? I know we had that disagreement the other night but I didn't think things were *that* bad."

That's part of the problem, Teddi thought. She turned to face him. "You and I aren't the same two people that we were when we started dating, Steve. I was thirteen then. We just don't...*match* anymore." Teddi wasn't sure if she could say she and Steve had ever matched. She just hadn't cared enough to notice.

Steve was quiet for a moment while he took in what Teddi had said. "Well, can't we...get to know each other again then?" Steve took her hand, his thumb rubbing the back of her hand softly. Teddi could remember when she had really, truly loved Steve. She couldn't really pinpoint when that had ended. But she could remember the way he used to make her blush whenever he flashed one of those lopsided grins her way, or the nervous butterflies in her stomach when he would sneak into her bedroom after Hopper had gone to bed.

There had been a time when Steve kissed Teddi it made her entire body feel like it was on vibrate. He'd been able to make her heart race and her stomach do those excited flips. She *loved* Steve. Maybe she just needed a reminder of why she had loved him all those years ago.

Teddi chewed on her bottom lip, she and Steve watching each other. His thumb was still rubbing gently at her skin. Steve let out a soft, nervous laugh. "C'mon, Teddi Girl. Don't make me beg here..."

"...How do you propose we do that then? Get to know each other again?" she found herself asking.

Steve smiled at her, his fingers linking with his. "...How about a second first date? A real one. Not where my mom drives us around and asks you a million questions." they both laughed softly. Steve had asked Teddi out in the ninth grade, the week before Valentine's Day. Kitty had insisted on being his personal chauffeur, and had driven

them to the pizza parlour and to the movies to see the Fog.

"Just tell me when and where."

"I'll pick you up at your place. How about tomorrow night?"

Teddi nodded, smiling despite herself. "It's a date...I gotta go though, I have to get to work."

"Right. I'll see you tomorrow night then." he flashed one of those grins that used to drive her crazy before he leaned in to kiss her. Teddi said her goodbyes, pulling herself from Steve and hurrying out to her car.

She was trying to steady her breathing as she started the van up. Teddi took in a deep breath, hiding her face in her hands as she let out a frustrated screech. She felt like she was going to have a panic attack. It had been years since she'd last had one, not since New York. Her hands clutched on tightly to the steering wheel as she tried to breath in and out slowly. Her knuckles were starting to turn white.

When had she turned into this girl? Someone that was too scared to give herself what she wanted? Too shy to share how she was really feeling? She wanted to *break up* with Steve, and now they were taking a second shot at things. Her mind drifted to Billy. Their night in the pool. She had told him she would end things with Steve. Now what was she going to do?

xxx

El was still up when Teddi got home from work. Her door was barely closed over, the light from her room the only thing illuminating the small cabin. She was talking to someone on the phone, giggling wildly about something. Teddi poked her head into her sister's room, waving at her. "I'm home...shouldn't you be going to bed? It's almost midnight."

El mumbled a *hold on* into the receiver, holding the phone to her chest. "Soon. Can you give me and Max a ride? Tomorrow?"

Teddi smiled, leaning against the doorway. "Max again, huh? What happened to spending all your time with Mike?" she teased.

"Max says there's more to life than stupid boys," El explained, as if it were obvious. "Can you? We want to go to Starcourt."

Teddi laughed. Max and El were on to something there. "Sorry, ET. I have a date with Steve. I'm sure dad'll take you guys." Teddi was sure Hopper would be more than happy to drive Max and El wherever they wanted to go if it meant less time around Mike.

El made a face, putting the phone back to her ear and breaking the news to Max. She was quiet for a moment, mumbling another *hold on*. "Max says she'll make Billy take us."

Teddi groaned at his name. "Whatever floats your boat, kid. I'm gonna go to bed. Keep it down so you don't wake dad up, huh?" she threw a wave over her shoulder before heading to her room. Teddi was once again jealous of her sister. Of course there was more to life than stupid boys. Why couldn't *she* follow that motto? It would definitely make her life a lot easier.

She briefly considered calling Steve to cancel their date and ask Heather if she wanted to tag along with Max and El instead while she changed into her pjs. It probably would've been more fun than sitting around being a bundle of nerves while Steve tried to impress her. Teddi let out a groan as she climbed into bed, wondering why she couldn't make things easier for herself.

There was a knock on Teddi's window. She jumped, sitting up and looking over to see what had made the noise. Billy was outside, smiling at her with that charming smile that made her stomach flip. Teddi slid out of bed, hurrying over and opening the window.

"Hey...cute jammies." he chuckled, looking down at the powder blue, button up pajamas Teddi was wearing. They were covered in tiny, white teddy bears.

Teddi shifted awkwardly, blushing a little. "My dad got them for me...y'know, 'cause my name's Teddi..." she explained.

Billy grinned. "That's *adorable*, Teddi Bear."

Her cheeks burned hotter, smiling up at him. "Listen, if I knew you'd

be sneaking through my window tonight I would've worn something less humiliating." she argued. Billy slipped through her window with ease, landing down on the wooden floors with a soft thud.

His grin turned into a smirk. "Oh yeah? What *would* you be wearing?" he wrapped an arm around her waist, pulling Teddi flush against him.

Teddi let out that little laugh that he loved again, rolling her eyes as she braced her hands against his chest. She fiddled with the buttons on his shirt. "What are you doing here, Billy? It's *late*."

"What, I can't wanna come see you?" he kissed her. Teddi let out a content sigh, her hands running up his chest and grasping onto his shoulders. Billy wrapped his arms around Teddi's waist, deepening the kiss.

El laughed loudly in the room next to them, making them pull apart. "It's just my sister," she assured him. "She's talking to *your* sister," Teddi said, poking him in the chest and pulling away from him. She sat at the end of her bed, pulling her knees to her chest as she watched Billy take her room in. "It's kinda nice that they've started hanging out. El doesn't have any girl friends her age."

Billy let out a soft scoff, shrugging his leather jacket off and tossing it onto her desk. "That's easy to say when you're not the one that has to drive them around everywhere," he mumbled, looking up at the cork board that was hanging up above Teddi's desk. Teddi watched Billy as he looked at the photos pinned there. He was wearing a button up shirt that she noticed was the same jade green color as her eyes that looked almost black in her dark room. The pendant around his neck was glinting brightly in the moonlight shining through the window, and there was a small smile on his lips. Teddi wished he'd stop looking at her pictures and kiss her again.

There were a few photos of Teddi and who Billy assumed was her dad. Teddi was young in the first one, younger than Max at least. Her sandy blonde hair was in pigtails and she was wearing a little pink dress. Her dad was crouched down next to her, trying to match Teddi's height as they posed in front of some Father's Day bulletin board covered with colorful cards Teddi's class had made. "...Your

dad's chief of police?" Billy asked, noticing the uniform her dad had been wearing.

Teddi smiled sheepishly. "Did I not mention that?"

Billy let out a small laugh, taking the other pictures in. There was another picture of her and her dad now. They were posing with El at a campfire with two other boys. One was around El's age, the other was the same age as Billy and Teddi. They had matching haircuts, Billy noticed with a snort. There were a few of Teddi with a girl he recognized from the pool, Heather, he remembered. And of course there were some of Teddi with *Steve*. Billy jabbed his finger at one of the photos, smiling over at Teddi. "You were a *cheerleader*?"

Teddi rolled her eyes, joining Billy over at her desk.. The picture in question had been taken after one of Steve's basketball games. Teddi didn't remember who had taken it. Steve's face was still flushed red from the game, and Teddi was smiling brightly up at him, dressed in the green and white uniform she had hated so much. "Steve was on a bunch of sports teams back in high school," she explained. "He suggested I try out so we could spend more time together. The other girls *hated* me. They said I wasn't peppy enough. But I was the only one that wasn't scared of doing stunts, so they put up with me." Billy let out a laugh.

"I was on the basketball team." he confessed.

Teddi looked up at him in surprise. "You?"

It was Billy's turn to roll his eyes. He grinned down at her. "Don't sound so surprised, Weird Girl. My old man drilled sports into my head as soon as I could walk. He wanted me to play baseball, but I was shit at it. That always drove him crazy. I think he never made a team when he was my age so he wanted to live vicariously through me or some shit like that. I was way better at basketball. I was captain and everything." the way Billy talked about playing basketball reminded Teddi of the way she talked about cheering. He didn't enjoy it, but it was something he was good at and it made someone else happy. It seemed like she was always doing things to make other people happy.

Teddi cleared her throat, one of her fingers linking with Billy's. "So, I went to see Steve today..."

Billy turned to her, an excited glint in his eye. "Oh yeah? How'd that go?" Teddi chewed on her lip, trying to decide how she'd break the news. Billy's smile faded. "...You didn't break up with him." it wasn't a question.

Teddi let out a groan. She pulled away from him, plopping down onto the bed and covering her face with her hands. "I *tried*. I told him I didn't want to see him anymore and that we were two completely different people and he was just so...*sad*-" she felt the bed dip beside her as Billy sat down. He chuckled, pulling her hands from her face. Teddi glared over at him. "What's *funny* about this?"

Billy shrugged. "I just figured you had more backbone than this is all." he said evenly.

"*Excuse me?*"

He laughed again, turning to face her. "Teddi, you're staying in a relationship with a guy you don't even *like* because you don't wanna hurt his feelings. When you met me you tried to kick my ass. Where's *that* girl?" Billy had a firm grip on Teddi's arms. She was unable to look away from him. Where *was* that girl? Teddi didn't know. Was she starting to lose herself? Was that why she'd told Steve she didn't know who she was anymore?

Teddi shook her head, pulling away from Billy. "Even if I do break up with Steve, what will happen? Will *we* date? Go *steady*? Or are you gonna sleep with me and move on to the next girl?" she had no reason to be irritated with Billy. She knew none of this was his fault. This was a situation she had gotten herself into.

"What? Teddi, what does it matter? You're making yourself fucking miserable. Do you have to have a plan for everything? Why can't you just do what you *want* instead of what people expect of you?" Teddi wanted Billy. Billy wanted her. What else really mattered? Teddi kissed him. They fell back onto her bed, Billy's hands touching and grabbing her anywhere and everywhere he could reach. Teddi loved the way it felt like the wind had been knocked out of her every time

Billy kissed her. It was like a big head rush, dizzy and disorienting in the best way possible.

Teddi made quick work of the few buttons Billy had buttoned, shoving his shirt down his arms. Billy pulled away long enough to toss his shirt across the room, reaching down to unbuckle his belt as Teddi tried to unbutton the top of her absolutely *embarrassing* pajamas as quickly as her shaky fingers would allow her.

Her breathing was coming out laboured, and her entire body was shaking as if she was on the verge of a panic attack. But it was a different sort of feelings. Exciting. Billy wrapped her legs around his waist, pressing himself against her core, both of them letting out breathy groans. As he helped her unbutton her top, pressing kisses to the love bites he'd left down her chest the night before, Teddi realized he was shaking just as badly as she was.

"El, I said no phone after te-" Teddi gasped as her door opened. She and Billy were frozen as they stared at Hopper standing in the doorway. He flicked the light on, and for a split second Teddi thought that just maybe he wouldn't explode. But only for a split second. Hopper's face turned a bright red, just like it always did when he got angry, and he jabbed an angry finger in their direction. "No. No! Who the hell is this, Teddi? What the hell are you two even- don't answer that. *Absolutely not!*"

Teddi sat up, holding the front of her top closed. "Dad, I promise it's not as bad as it looks-" that was a lie.

"What happened to Steve? *You!*" Hopper pointed a finger at Billy. "I want you out of my house! Let's go, Fabio!" Teddi couldn't blame Billy for looking as scared as he did. She'd never seen him move so quickly either. Billy jumped up from the bed, swiping up his shirt, pressing a quick, brazen kiss to her lips and skirting past Hopper.

"Call me!" Billy called over his shoulder.

"Over my dead body!" Hopper called behind him. Teddi quickly buttoned up her top, pressing her hands to her chest to try and calm her heartbeat. Hopper wheeled back around, wordlessly staring at his daughter. His arms were crossed tightly over his chest, his foot

tapping. Teddi hated it when this mood was pointed in her direction. "Who was that?" he asked.

"Billy..." Teddi said quietly.

"And who is Billy?" he was pinching the bridge of his nose.

"He works at the pool with me. He just moved here..." El had come out of her room and was standing in the living room, peering around Hopper and listening in to what was happening. "I'm really sorry. I didn't know he was gonna come over and everything just happened so fast-"

Hopper held up his hand. "I have to be up for work in *four hours*. I am not in the mental space to hear anything about Billy, or whatever it is that happened with Steve, or even process what I just walked in on my *daughter* doing. But I will say that I am *way* too young to become a pop pop, Teddi. And I would like for everyone to keep that in mind the next time you decide to sneak a boy over." El let out a small laugh, covering her mouth to stifle it. Hopper turned to look at her, looking between his daughters for a few moments. "Actually, you know what? New rule. No boys over. *At all*. Ever. No more keeping the door open three inches. It doesn't matter if I'm home or not. No boys," he turned, pointing a finger at El. "And no phone after ten."

Both girls nodded. El was trying her best not to start giggling again as Hopper stomped off to his room. Teddi let out a breath she hadn't realized she had been holding, burying her face in her hands. El walked into Teddi's room, standing in the doorway just like Hopper had been moments before. Her arms were crossed, but she didn't look upset. More curious. "You said you had a date with Steve." she said.

"Yeah..." Teddi sighed out.

El quirked an eyebrow. "...Do you lie?"

"I wish I was lying. I'm just...really stupid." Teddi groaned.

El shuffled further into Teddi's room, hopping up onto Teddi's bed. She placed a comforting hand on her sister's shoulder. "...Dump his ass." she said firmly.

Teddi couldn't help but laugh. "Dump his ass? Which one?" she asked, letting out another small laugh before groaning again. "Actually don't answer that. I already know the answer...don't grow up, Ellie Bean. It's totally a trap."

El let out a small laugh, the two sisters smiling at each other. "Deal." she nodded, bumping her shoulder against Teddi's.

"...I don't know how much sleep I'm gonna get now. You wanna watch Xanadu?"

El was up and off of the bed almost before Teddi could get the question out. "I'll make popcorn!" she said, hurrying out of the room. Teddi let out a small laugh, grabbing her comforter to take out with her to the couch. She paused when something caught her eye. Billy's jacket. It was still laying there on her desk. Teddi let out a shaky breath, shaking her head and walking out of her room. She wasn't going to dwell on that anymore tonight.

There was more to life than stupid boys.